

Jacquy Pfeiffer and the French Pastry School of Chicago

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Fresh bread bakes in the oven, fruit tarts and delectable cakes line the counters, sculptures crafted of sugar and chocolate grace the center of a table, and creamy sorbet and ice cream cool in the freezer. This is not a gourmet restaurant kitchen. It is Jacquy Pfeiffer's classroom.

There are many types of educators and Jacquy Pfeiffer leads the way in the art of making pastry. A pastry chef prepares baked desserts from basic ingredients like flour, water, sugar, and shortening. This once obscure and seemingly unglamorous profession is now one of the most respected culinary arts. Today, pastry chefs find work in small corner bakeries or five-star restaurants because people want elegant desserts and not mass-produced frozen food. In fact, a pastry chef may share equal rank with the head chef, even collaborating on the flavors used for an entire meal. Pastry chefs have hosted cooking shows, written cookbooks, and even established schools to train new pastry chefs.

Jacquy Pfeiffer, co-founder of the French Pastry School in Chicago, is one such chef-turned-educator. Pfeiffer has worked with pastry his whole life, beginning at age fifteen when he apprenticed in a pastry shop in Strasbourg, France. Realizing his love for preparing pastry, he decided to make it his life's work. He studied food technology at Baldung Grien College in France where he was named "Best Apprentice". After graduating, he refined his skills by working in a series of celebrated pastry shops in Alsace, France, including Chocolaterie Egli and Patisserie Naegel. Soon his culinary

talent took him beyond the borders of his native country. He served as head pastry chef for the richest man in the world, the Sultan of Brunei, and then worked as top pastry chef at the Hyatt Regency in Hong Kong. Eventually, he realized that the greatest opportunities awaited him in the United States, and he moved to Chicago in 1992 to become pastry chef at the Fairmont Hotel. That same year he won the title “Best Pastry Chef in America” and went on to win it again in 1996 and 1997. Subsequently, he has worked at the new Sheraton Chicago Hotel and Towers. Since arriving in the United States, he has collected many other awards in pastry competitions both national and international.

Perhaps his greatest accomplishment, however, is the French Pastry School, which he founded in 1995. He joined forces with Sebastion Cononne, a long-time colleague in the pastry business, to create the school. “The focus of the French Pastry School is to share knowledge and focus on imparting to students the latest food technology and simplified production methods,” Pfeiffer stated. He selected Chicago for his culinary school because none existed there at the time. His syllabus covers specialty cakes, regular cakes, bread, petits fours, tarts, ice cream, sorbets, and chocolate candy. Other courses include the business end of the profession as well as competitive cooking and food service sanitation. Now in its tenth year, the school by all accounts is a success, even winning the prestigious Jean Banchet Award, which recognizes outstanding culinary schools.

Jacquy and Sebastion are not just the owners of the school. They teach in the classroom on a daily basis, and they use their own experiences to educate others about the pastry business. These two Frenchmen have shortened the venerable European tradition

of lengthy apprenticeship into an intensive six-month curriculum called “L’art de la Pâtisserie”. Even after graduation, Pfeiffer and Cononne offer their students guidance and support as they fulfill their pastry dreams.

Students at the school come from all walks of life. Some are policemen and some are housewives; however, it takes more than just an interest in pastry to be a pastry chef. One has to be ready to do the same thing over and over again and to be very exact. A steady number of people is willing to put in the effort, and thanks to Jacquy Pfeiffer and his colleague, Americans have had an opportunity to enter a profession that is prestigious, lucrative, and best of all, has delicious results. [From Jacqueline Dulen, “Sweetness and Light” Restaurants and Institutions. <http://80-firstsearch.ocic.org.proxy2.library.uiuc.edu/webz/PTFETCH?SESSION> (Sept. 1, 2005); Jacquy Pfeiffer. <http://www.frenchpastryschool.com> (Aug. 31, 2005); Jacquy Pfeiffer—Team Manager and Judge 1. <http://www.pastrychampionship.com> (July 6, 2005); Polly Lattue, “Sweet Profits” <http://80-firstsearch.ocic.org.proxy2.library.uiuc.edu/webz/FTFETCH?SESSION> (Sept. 1, 2005).]